

American

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Secretary Kerry: The Crush on Wildlife

14 November 2013

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The Crush on Wildlife

By John Kerry

Today, in Denver, the Department of the Interior is destroying the United States' entire stock of confiscated contraband ivory -- totaling nearly six tons.

With this action, the United States is sending a simple but powerful message to the sadistic poachers who kill elephants and other animals, and to all the traffickers who transport illicit cargo and the consumers who purchase these illicit goods: "You cannot and must not mistake our seriousness."

We're not in this fight alone. We are building on the work of Kenya, Gabon, and the Philippines, which have destroyed their ivory stocks in recent years. We encourage other countries to take a strong stand against wildlife trafficking by destroying their ivory stockpiles.

But make no mistake: The world needs to do more. Time is not on our side.

One night last year, American scientists at the Dzangha-Bai reserve in the Central African Republic were forced to abandon a long-term elephant research site in the middle of the night due to instability in the area. When they returned the following day, the scientists discovered an unspeakable scene: The herd of elephants they had observed for decades was dead and tusk-less. Criminals had shot the defenseless elephants from the very research platform where they had been studied for so many years.

This is not an isolated incident. When my wife Teresa and I visited a wildlife preserve and went on safari in 2007, I heard tragic story after story of similar episodes. Last year, we held the Foreign Relations Committee's first ever hearing on wildlife trafficking to underscore the extent of the crisis.

Slaughters of wildlife have grown exponentially. The scale, pace, and sophistication of elephant and rhino poaching are accelerating at a devastating pace. Not only are these majestic animals disappearing before us, as poachers grow in sophistication and firepower, this explosion in trafficking undermines the stability and security of range states, and imperils those whose livelihoods depend on these great creatures and ecosystems.

We do not have the luxury of time. We must act urgently and raise public awareness.

Just yesterday, on November 13, I announced a reward of up to \$1 million for information to help dismantle the Xaysavang Network, one of the most prolific wildlife trafficking organizations currently in operation. This is the first reward offer under our Transnational Organized Crime Rewards Program. Criminals and their accomplices are on notice.

And it's not just elephants and rhinos on the losing side of the rifles and machine guns. The accelerating demand for animal skin, pelts, bones and organs is decimating species across the world. When one species is gone, poachers move onto the next. If the current trajectory continues, many of these animals will go extinct during my grandchildren's lifetimes.

Reducing demand is part of any successful strategy to meet this challenge. Consumers can and must be partners with governments in disrupting the market incentives for traffickers. Because the reality is that prices for ivory and rhino horn are skyrocketing, which in turn leads to the knock down effects of more involvement of transnational organized criminals and other destabilizing elements, more corruption, and more collateral damage. Illicit funds allow poachers to ramp up their firepower and employ ruthless tactics that jeopardize communities and rule of law in countries across the globe. In Africa, poachers kill more than one hundred park rangers in the line of duty annually.

Wildlife trafficking is a conservation problem, an economic problem, a health problem, and a security problem. Our governments and citizens cannot afford to stand idle while poachers and wildlife traffickers destabilize whole regions, undermine economic development, and hunt elephants, rhinos, tigers, bears, sharks, or any species to extinction. Leaders everywhere must step up and meet the challenge of rooting out the corruption, graft, and complicity in the system that threaten all of us. The United States is committed to doing our part. Let's move forward.

(John F. Kerry is the United States secretary of state.)

U.S. Officials Cautiously Optimistic About Aid in Philippines

By Cheryl Pellerin | American Forces Press Service |
14 November 2013

This article was originally published on the Defense Department website on November 13.

Washington — After days of logistical challenges that

kept thousands of Tacloban City's desperate storm survivors cut off from food, water and medical supplies, air and overland routes are starting to open, senior administration officials familiar with the relief effort said November 13.

Since it made landfall in the Philippines November 7, Typhoon Haiyan has affected more than 1.7 million families and 8 million people across nine regions of the Southeast Asian archipelago, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council.

"In brief, what we've done is to respond quite quickly in a very coordinated way, bringing people to the disaster zone to assess the extent of the damage so we know what's needed and coordinating with our Philippine colleagues," a senior administration official told reporters November 13, as part of a background briefing on recovery efforts arranged for the media.

Then supplies, equipment and assets would be brought in to help deal with casualties and losses and to try to get logistics going, the official added, "so the assistance that comes in from now on can be distributed effectively. It's a pretty major effort on the part of the U.S. government."

The U.S. Embassy in Manila has been active, the official said, in touch with Philippine officials and with other U.S. agencies involved in disaster relief.

President Obama called President Benigno Aquino on November 11 to express condolences and support, the official said, and Secretary of State John Kerry spoke with Philippines Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario earlier this week.

"We've been taking very much an organized, coordinated whole-of-government approach to try to respond as best we can to meet the humanitarian needs," the official said.

In anticipation of the storm and its landfall in the Philippines, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) deployed an advance disaster assistance response team to Manila, another senior administration official told reporters.

"We had that team on the ground in the affected zones within 24 hours of the storm hitting, and that was the first international governmental response team to reach the area," he added.

That team has been determining priorities over the past few days, the official said, which has helped the U.S. government prioritize and structure the response.

USAID has worked hand in hand with the U.S. military to coordinate the response, this official added, by providing

and funding the assistance and working closely with the military on coordinating delivery and prioritizing what goes where.

The U.S. government to date has provided an initial \$20 million in humanitarian assistance, half through the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance. The aid is being used for emergency shelter, water purification and hygiene to prevent water-borne and other diseases. The rest is spent on food aid in partnership with the World Food Programme.

"I would say we are cautiously optimistic that we are starting to turn a corner on some of the logistics challenges," the official said.

"In the last 24 hours we have seen some improvements in the coordination at the airport ... but also very critically, an overland route to Tacloban City has now been opened," he said, describing the original conditions as being like trying to squeeze an orange through a straw, and now having more and bigger straws.

"Through some of the military assets we are able now to get aid into some of the coastal villages that were destroyed," the official added.

In the past 24 hours USAID and its U.S. Pacific Command counterparts have been delivering emergency shelter, hygiene and water-purification supplies to villages in some affected coastal areas. The aid is starting to push and that will accelerate in the coming days, he said.

Another administration official told reporters the Department of Defense is doing all it can to urgently provide support in close coordination with the U.S. Embassy in Manila, USAID, and international partners to the government of the Philippines and their lead in the relief operations.

"Right now our 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade Headquarters, with over 307 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, are on deck in the Philippines and have begun initial relief operations as of November 10," he said, adding that over 1,000 Marines could be deployed to the affected area by the end of the week.

U.S. forces are supporting the armed forces of the Philippines and moving them into the area so they can help alleviate security concerns in Tacloban and the surrounding area.

"Our assessment [of the security situation] on the ground from the DOD side is predominantly that the threat would be armed looters and second would be vector-borne diseases," one U.S. official said.

"At this time there are medical supplies that are being routed inbound. We have contingencies to take care of our forces and cover for the convoys as well, so the security situation is felt to be well in hand at this point," he said.

Treasury Secretary Lew: A U.S.-Asia Agenda for Growth

12 November 2013

U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew gives a preview of his upcoming trip to Tokyo; Singapore; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Beijing and how advancing complementary economic reforms in Asia and the United States can help pave the way for a strong, balanced and sustainable global economy that expands economic opportunities for citizens in both the United States and Asia.

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A U.S.-Asia Agenda for Growth

By Jacob J. Lew

Both sides ought to work toward rebalancing global growth for long-term gain.

The United States and Asia are two vital pillars of the global economy. These are important times as we pursue pro-growth policies and chart a course to expand opportunities for the next generation. Policies we each pursue have a substantial impact on one another. I am here in Asia this week to deepen our cooperation to increase demand, provide shared benefits throughout the global economy and level the playing field for our workers and businesses.

That is why we must complete the process of rebalancing global growth. With emerging economies playing an increasingly large role in the global economy, we must move away from a pattern of global growth that is built on the U.S. being the world's importer.

Since the global financial crisis, the imbalances of the U.S. and Asian economies have adjusted significantly. However, some of the correction has come from ongoing weak demand in the advanced economies. The process of global rebalancing remains incomplete. And as Asian countries that have grown more on the basis of domestic demand now take steps to increase their resilience, it is all the more important for Asia's surplus economies to draw on domestic sources for growth and move toward greater exchange rate flexibility.

China is undergoing a systemic transition toward domestic consumption, and away from resource-intensive

export growth. These efforts are imperative to sustain strong growth in the medium term. At the same time, China needs to move more quickly to a market-determined exchange rate and more open access to its markets.

There are some signs of progress on the horizon. China's current account surplus has fallen. Beijing has committed to pursue a high-standard bilateral investment treaty that includes all sectors with the U.S. The Shanghai Free Trade Zone pilot could lead to more open investment. We and the world will be watching closely this week as the Chinese leadership announces its new plan for reforms.

In Japan, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has promised three arrows of reform. While we welcome an end to deflation, to achieve sustained success Japan needs to strengthen domestic demand growth, avoid simple reliance on exports, and continue to respect G-7 and G-20 commitments not to target exchange rates. Structural reforms and a carefully calibrated fiscal adjustment will be key to supporting the ongoing recovery in demand so that Japan can realize lasting growth.

Recently, some emerging markets in Asia have slowed as the post-crisis stimulus wanes. There has long been a recognition that macroeconomic policy in the U.S. and other advanced economies will eventually return to normal as growth strengthens. Asian economies should now accelerate reforms to increase resilience against shifts in capital flows, and to address structural constraints to growth. We have already seen that economies that are undertaking reforms are better positioned to manage this transition.

In the United States, while there is still more work to do, our economy is slowly rebounding. Five years ago, we confronted a devastating financial crisis that triggered the worst recession since the Great Depression. Beginning in 2009, President Barack Obama's administration reformed, repaired and recapitalized the financial sector. We acted decisively to provide fiscal support for jobs and private demand. While long-term fiscal policy requires tough decisions, and we have made many hard fiscal choices, we knew we could not cut our way to prosperity. In 2010, as the recovery slowed, it was clear that the economy needed additional help to gain strength in the face of headwinds from abroad, and we acted again through a temporary cut in the payroll tax.

Because of these measures and notwithstanding the recent political headwinds, we have been moving in the right direction. Since 2009, our economy has been expanding. Over the past 44 months, private employers have added 7.8 million jobs in the United States. Over the last year alone, our businesses have added more than 2 million jobs. Manufacturing is recovering, and the housing

market has improved.

After difficult budget deliberations, we reduced spending, and moved to higher tax rates for top earners. The federal deficit fell to 4.1 percent of GDP for the fiscal year that just ended, less than half what it was four years ago. On top of that, we are experiencing an energy revolution in America. We produce more natural gas than at any time in history.

Now, we need to build on these strengths and deepen our ties with the most dynamic region in the world. The Trans-Pacific Partnership is the cornerstone of our shared growth agenda, creating new opportunities for boosting trade, investment and innovation. It is envisioned as a “living agreement” that other Asia-Pacific economies willing to take on the high standard TPP obligations can join.

The United States and Asia share the same hopes about the future, where our citizens have greater economic opportunities. By advancing reforms in our respective countries that are complementary, together we can pave the way for a strong, balanced, and sustainable global economy.

(Jacob J. Lew is the United States secretary of the treasury.)

U.S. Invests to Lower Carbon Capture Cost, Fight Climate Change

12 November 2013

Washington — As part of the Obama administration’s Climate Action Plan, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) selected 18 projects across the country to research innovative, second-generation technologies “that will help improve the efficiency and drive down costs of carbon capture processes for new and existing coal-fired power plants,” the department said on its website November 7.

“In the past four years we’ve more than doubled renewable energy generation from wind and solar power,” Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said. “However, coal and other fossil fuels still provide 80 percent of our energy, 70 percent of our electricity and will be a major part of our energy future for decades. That’s why any serious effort to protect future generations from the worst effects of climate change must also include developing, demonstrating and deploying the technologies to use our abundant fossil fuel resources as cleanly as possible.

The projects, Moniz added, will help ensure “America’s continued international leadership in combating climate change.”

To date, the Obama administration has invested \$6 billion in clean coal technologies to ensure the United States continues to have access to safe, sustainable and affordable energy from its abundant domestic fossil resources. Developing, demonstrating and deploying these technologies is a critical part of President Obama’s all-of-the-above approach to American energy, the department said.

With nearly \$84 million in investments from the Energy Department — and additional cost-share from industry, universities and other research institutions — the projects will support the development of advanced technologies that will help enable efficient, cost-effective application of carbon capture and storage processes for new and existing coal-fired power plants.

Projects will conduct carbon capture research for two different fossil power generation processes. For traditional, combustion-based power plants — like most coal-fired plants today — research will focus on more efficiently capturing carbon dioxide emissions post combustion. More advanced, gasification-based electric power plants break down coal — or almost any carbon-based feedstock — into its chemical constituents before any combustion takes place. Research into this technology will improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of pre-combustion carbon capture, DOE said.

The United States views its investments in climate change and energy efficiency research as a benefit to the global community. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, another key agency in U.S. climate and environment research, says the United States “is engaged in a number of multilateral activities that promote clean and efficient technologies and the sharing of critical scientific information among a wide range of government, private sector, academic, and other interested stakeholders. These actions emphasize international cooperation to develop an efficient and coordinated response to global climate change.”

One example, the Carbon Sequestration Leadership Forum (CSLF), is an international climate change initiative focused on the development and improvement of technologies for the separation and capture of carbon dioxide for transport and long-term safe storage. The purpose of the CSLF is to make these technologies broadly available internationally and to identify and address wider issues relating to carbon capture and storage. Activities include promoting the appropriate technical, political, and regulatory environments for the development of such technology. The CSLF was launched in early 2003 by the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Energy.

World Bank Encourages More Financial Inclusion

By Kathryn McConnell | Staff Writer | 12 November 2013

Washington — Financial institutions that design no-frills services that allow low-income people to save and transfer money help to empower citizens and reduce poverty, according to the World Bank.

International forums like the Group of 20 (G20) and the World Bank have moved up financial inclusion on their reform agendas, the Bank said. The G20 brings together finance ministers and central bank governors from 19 major economies including the United States plus the European Union.

In its *2014 Global Financial Development Report: Financial Inclusion*, released November 11, the Bank said more than 50 countries recently have set targets to improve universal financial inclusion. In October, World Bank President Jim Young Kim announced an initiative to provide universal financial access to all working-age adults by 2020 “with the help of technological innovations such as e-money accounts and e-mobile wallets.” He said efforts should focus on low-income people, women, youth, rural residents and other vulnerable groups.

About half of the world’s adult population — or 2.5 billion people — currently does not have an account at a formal financial institution due to lack of demand or barriers like cost, travel distance and documentation requirements, the Bank said. It also said that in developing economies, 35 percent of small enterprises say that access to finance is a major obstacle to their operations.

In its report, the World Bank said low-income people gain the most from technological improvements that make financial services cheaper and easier to access. “Low-income economies, especially those with remote, sparsely populated areas, have much to gain from allowing the provision of financial services outside of established bank branches” at such places as retail stores and petrol stations, and from agents on motorcycles or river boats, the Bank said.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is working to make mobile technology a core part of its work, including transitioning programs from cash to e-payments. Working with organizations like the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and Mercy Corps, it has helped people understand what mobile money is and how they can benefit if they use it.

“Shifting to electronic distribution of social benefits, humanitarian aid or payroll payments can advance financial inclusion and help poor people build savings

while achieving cost savings, efficiency and transparency,” USAID’s Abby Sugrue wrote in a posting on the USAID Impact Blog.

USAID has done several country studies on the development and adoption of mobile money as a mechanism to transmit payments and promote financial inclusion. But World Bank Director of Research Asli Demirguc-Kunt said financial services have been beyond many peoples’ reach because market and government failures pushed the cost of services to prohibitively high levels or because of regulatory and legal hurdles.

The Bank urged policymakers to improve standards for information disclosure and to support well-designed new financial products that address market failures. It wants policymakers to help consumers overcome some of their “behavioral hurdles” like reluctance to commit to a savings account that makes cash available only after a set period of time. It encouraged policymakers to embrace technologies like borrower identification systems involving fingerprint or iris scans.

In the report, the Bank said there is “considerable evidence” that low-income people and small firms “benefit enormously” from basic payments, savings accounts and insurance services, and that access to finance is associated with job creation and economic growth. It warned, however, that subsidizing these services can lead to financial instability.

The Bank said that efforts to protect consumers should include competition policies that reward better performers and increase the power of consumers in the marketplace.

U.S. Sends Mercury Treaty Ratification to U.N.

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 08 November 2013

Washington — A global agreement to reduce environmental pollution from the heavy metal mercury moved forward November 6 when the United States became the first nation to send ratifying documents to the United Nations. That action from the U.S. Department of State came on the same day that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs Kerri-Ann Jones signed the Minamata Convention.

Now signed by 93 countries, the treaty earned its first round of signatures in Kumamoto, Japan, October 10. U.S. representatives were unable to attend that event because of a federal government shutdown.

“The Minamata Convention is a major step forward to address mercury exposure and improve public health,”

Jones said in a news release issued by the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP). "The Minamata Convention is an important achievement for the health of people around the world and the U.S. is pleased to be able to join the Convention."

The Minamata Convention is named for a Japanese fishing village where thousands of people were poisoned by mercury in the mid-20th century. For more than 30 years, a factory dumped mercury-containing waste into Minamata Bay, which was an important fishing site and food source for the nearby population.

About 50,000 people suffered some health effects, according to the World Health Organization, and more than 2,000 cases of Minamata disease — marked by brain damage, paralysis and delirium — were certified.

Mercury is a naturally occurring element, used in a variety of industrial processes. This "global and ubiquitous metal," as it is described by UNEP, enters the food chain and stays, a process known as bioaccumulation. Mercury lingers in the tissue of microorganisms and fish that are subsequently consumed by humans.

Health agencies have classified mercury poisoning as a major public health threat, particularly for children, women of childbearing age and populations dependent on fish and marine mammals as a large part of the diet. Native peoples of Arctic regions, for instance, are at particular risk. The broad range of potential health consequences of mercury poisoning includes irritability, tremors, disturbances to vision, memory loss, impaired thyroid and liver function and cardiovascular problems.

Once released into the environment, mercury can travel long distances through winds and waters, which is another reason effective countermeasures must be taken at a global level. As an element, it does not break down into more benign components.

The UNEP governing council took the first step toward the Minamata Convention in 2009. From its Nairobi, Kenya, headquarters, UNEP has supported the negotiation process that produced this agreement. U.N. Under-Secretary-General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner said, "Almost everyone in the world — be they small-scale gold miners, expectant mothers or waste-handlers in developing countries — will benefit from its provisions."

Environmental releases of mercury through small-scale gold mining have become a particular concern in recent years as the price of gold has quadrupled over the last 15 years. Miners use the heavy metal to extract gold from ore, but in doing so they expose themselves to its toxic

effects and release it into the environment.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has worked with miners in Senegal and in the Brazilian and Peruvian Amazon to introduce methods that minimize the release of hazardous mercury vapors in ore extraction and gold processing. These methods are "dramatically reducing mercury levels for workers, customers, and the surrounding communities," EPA reports.

EPA has been involved in UNEP's Global Mercury Partnership since 2005, working with governments, manufacturers and industries to reduce mercury use and emissions. EPA is also leading global work to reduce use and demand for mercury-containing products. This effort is devoted to finding substitutions and identifying mercury alternatives for use in product manufacture.

EPA and the global partnership are also reducing and eliminating mercury releases that occur in manufacturing processes or through the use of mercury-containing products. In one initiative, EPA has worked in several countries to eliminate mercury-containing medical devices in hospitals.

About half of the global human-caused mercury emissions come from the burning of coal, metals production and the production of cement, according to UNEP. Improving controls on releases occurring through industrial uses is a key objective of the convention. By becoming parties to the treaty, nations commit to reducing mercury use as viable alternatives to mercury become available. Over time, UNEP documents say, these actions will reduce the demand for mercury, cutting the market and the demand for a mercury supply.

The United States has already taken significant steps to reduce the amount of mercury released to the environment domestically.

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)